



# Against the Tide: Projects and Pathways of the New Generation of Union Leaders, 1984-2001

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Citation	Ganz, Marshall, Kim Voss, Teresa Sharpe, Carl Somers and George Strauss. 2004. "Against the Tide: Projects and Pathways of the New Generation of Union Leaders, 1984-2001." <i>Rebuilding Labor: Organizing and Organizers in the New Union Movement</i> , eds. Ruth Milkman and Kim Voss: 150-194. Ithaca, NY: ILR Press.
Citable link	<a href="http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:29429753">http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:29429753</a>
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# **REBUILDING LABOR**

## **ORGANIZING AND ORGANIZERS IN THE NEW UNION MOVEMENT**



**Edited by Ruth Milkman and Kim Voss**

**AN ILR PRESS BOOK**

*Cornell University Press  
Ithaca and London*

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First published 2004 by Cornell University Press  
First printing, Cornell Paperbacks, 2004

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Rebuilding labor : organizing and organizers in the new union movement

/ edited by Ruth Milkman and Kim Voss.

p. cm.—(An ILR press book)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

"The chapters in this book were first presented at a conference organized by the editors under the auspices of the University of California's Institute for Labor and Employment, held at UCLA on May 17, 2001"—P.

ISBN 0-8014-4265-6 (cloth : alk. paper)—ISBN 0-8014-8902-4 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Labor unions—United States—History—20th century—Congresses.  
2. Labor movement—United States—History—20th century—  
Congresses. 3. Labor leaders—United States—History—20th century—  
Congresses. 4. Labor unions—United States—Political  
activity—History—20th century—Congresses. 5. Industrial relations—  
United States—History—20th century—Congresses. 6. Working  
class—United States—History—20th century—Congresses. I. Milkman,  
Ruth, 1954– II. Voss, Kim. III. Series.

HD5708.R43 2004  
331.88'0973—dc22

2004006703

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Cloth printing 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1  
Paperback printing 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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## AGAINST THE TIDE

PROJECTS AND PATHWAYS OF THE NEW GENERATION  
OF UNION LEADERS, 1984–2001

Marshall Ganz, Kim Voss, Teresa Sharpe, Carl Somers, and George Strauss

John Sweeney's election to the presidency of the AFL-CIO in 1996 sparked a major effort by American unions to "reinvent" themselves. Concurrent with the "Sweeney revolution," a dramatic generational turnover occurred in the leadership of major unions, labor councils, and state federations. Andrew Stern, 52, a graduate of and student activist at the University of Pennsylvania, rose to lead America's largest union, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). Similarly, John Wilhelm, 56, the president of the Hotel Employees Restaurant Employees Union (HERE), a graduate of Yale, also came to labor as a student activist. A similar generational shift took place at the state and local level. Miguel Contreras, 50, the son of migrant farm workers and a former organizer for Cesar Chavez's United Farm Workers, began to lead the Los Angeles Federation of Labor in 1998. Josie Mooney, 48, a college-educated, former community organizer, leads the Bay Area public workers union and serves as president of the San Francisco Labor Council; she is the first woman to occupy those posts. Members of this generation are also responsible for new efforts to bring young people into the labor movement, such as college-educated apprentices recruited by the AFL-CIO Organizing Institute and Union Summer and, to a lesser degree, new immigrants who have been mobilized through campaigns like "Justice for Janitors."

Where did this new generation of California union leaders come from? Why did they join the union movement? How have their careers unfolded? And where are they today?

These questions are intriguing, because this generation came to work for unions in the 1970s, a time when organized labor was shrinking and offered few opportunities for advancement. Unions were no longer at the center of a social movement either. In fact, some unions' responses to the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War led many political activists to see them as "part of the problem, rather than part of the solution." Yet some activists like Stern and Wilhelm did enter the labor movement. What led them to union work? And what effect have they had? Many observers have reported on the influence of members of this "'60s generation" on other American institutions (Katzenstein 1998; McAdam 1988; Klatch 1999). What about their influence on unions?

Existing scholarship on union leadership is of little help in answering these questions; it neither looks at this generation of union leaders nor grapples with questions of how the reasons people come to work for unions shapes their subsequent careers. Previous scholars have tended to limit their studies to successful union leaders selected at one moment in time. This method fails to observe the processes by which some sustained their commitment while others fell by the wayside or why some leaders have had more influence than others (Mills 1948; Quaglieri 1988). Moreover, existing research is frequently more descriptive than explanatory and therefore provides little theoretical guidance for understanding how career paths develop over time. Recently, a few researchers have begun to investigate the retention of union staff, but their focus has been on brand new recruits rather than those with a demonstrated long-term commitment to union work (see Rooks; Bunnage and Stepan-Norris, both in this volume).

This study is the first to focus on the generation of leaders currently heading the American labor movement. Rather than learning only about those who have become top leaders, we study a broad range of union leaders. And instead of focusing on a single moment, we use a longitudinal approach that allows us to investigate how careers evolve over time. Our research draws on a unique database of 68 California men and women who were first interviewed in 1984 when they were selected for study as rising young labor leaders. We interviewed them again in 2001 and 2002.

Studying California labor leaders is particularly useful for understanding attempts to revitalize unions. Not only do California unions represent 15 percent of all American union members today, but they were also especially active during the period of this study (BLS 2002). Significant attempts at union renewal in California, for example, include SEIU's "Justice for Janitors" campaigns, the Los Angeles Federation of Labor's grassroots political program, and unionization of 100,000 home health care providers.

### MOVING BEYOND DEMOGRAPHICS

Many scholars of union leadership have followed in the footsteps of C. Wright Mills, who published his very influential portrait of American union leaders in 1948. It was a time when unions were growing and accumulating political power, and Mills located those leaders in the larger social and political context of post-Second World War American society. The leaders Mills studied were a newly empowered group of strategic actors; understanding their social origins, education, party ties, and the like were of interest in and of themselves. Mills demonstrated that most union leaders were self-made men. He did not inquire in any depth about their motivation for joining the labor movement, assuming their incentive was self-evident: these men of humble social origins entered union work because unions were a source of power and upward mobility.

When scholars focused on demographics, they assumed unionists' motivations rather than asking about them.<sup>1</sup> This emphasis made sense when unions were growing and gaining influence, and when unions were dominated by workers who came up from the ranks. Investigating motivation not only seemed unnecessary, but also was out of step with a focus on structure that has held sway in social science thinking in recent years. To the extent that students of leadership in the arenas of management (Hollander 1978; Bass 1990), political science (Kellerman 1986), and social movement theory (Oberschall 1973; Wickham-Crowley 1992) examine motivation at all, they do so primarily in terms of class background, education, and personality—and the relationship of those factors to the kind of work leaders do. Since the 1970s, however, it has been less self-evident that anyone, including rank-and-file workers, would be attracted to union work as a means of gaining social power. This makes the question of motivation—and what difference it might make—more relevant.

Moreover, sociologists have become much more interested in the role that agency plays in social life and how intentionality and purpose shape social action. This approach is rooted in a sociological tradition originating with Weber, Mead, and Schutz, and linked recently with narrative theory by Mische and others (Emirbeyer and Mische 1998; Mische 2003). In this view, an individual's choices unfold through a narrative process that situates motives for present action within a context of past recollection and future projection (Bruner 1990). Therefore, one's "project" is his account of where he hopes to go (his goals), why he wants to get there (his motivations), and how he thinks he can arrive at his destination (his means).<sup>2</sup> Paying attention to purpose then does not suggest individuals end up where they do because of random caprice. Choices are neither entirely spontaneous nor entirely predictable, but adaptive (Bandura 1990).<sup>3</sup>

Since projects are the outcome of this narrative process, they are not fixed. They are constructed and reconstructed as circumstances change and actors "continually reassess future possibilities in the face of past experiences" (Mische 2003). Sometimes our goals work out, and sometimes they do not. Sometimes we persist in finding new ways to pursue them, but other times we change them. Thus, career pathways can be viewed as devised rather than followed.

However, actors' projects and career pathways unfold in interaction with organizational settings (Barley 1989; Gunz 1989). To the extent that organizations pursue collective projects, an individual's project may be more or less dissonant with that of his or her organization and thus more or less aligned with its financial, political, and status incentives. Intention itself is influenced by organizational settings, "shifting with changing structures of interest and attention" (Mische 2003). So we would expect the projects of individuals within particular organizations to converge through processes of selection and adaptation: people leaving and people changing.<sup>4</sup> But how, then, do organizations change? Is it solely a matter of changes in the environment, or do people's projects have an influence? If so, what kinds of projects? And under what conditions? In this paper we study the role of projects systematically by analyzing what people say and how they say it, and comparing the results across individuals, organizations, and outcomes.<sup>5</sup>

### HOW WE LEARNED ABOUT UNION LEADERSHIP

The initial data for this study comes from a set of interviews with 130 California union leaders, conducted in 1984 by Marshall Ganz and Scott Washburn. These interviews were designed to provide insight into the future direction of the California labor movement. With the support of California labor organizations and a number of small foundations, Ganz and Washburn targeted a set of younger, full-time union leaders. Most of these leaders had organizing experience, had earned positions of responsibility in their unions, and had built reputations among their colleagues for a commitment to union revitalization. The interviewees were broadly representative of the full range of California unions, industries, and regions. However, special emphasis was placed on organizers, women, people of color, those who were 30 to 45 years of age at the time, and those with records of success. Eighty-six people in the original sample were between the ages of 30 and 45. They worked for unions active in the public sector, services, manufacturing, building trades, and transportation. Each two to three hour interview was extensive and focused on the respondent's family background, career to date, mentoring, views of organizing, beliefs about leadership, and expectations for the future. The findings

were never published, except in presentations made to union leaders in 1985–86 and in a few article references (Kuttner 1987). Instead, the notes sat in a trunk in a Salinas, California, warehouse until 2001.

The present study builds on the data collected in 1984. We re-interviewed the original respondents to compare their positions in 1984 with their current positions and to learn how they got there. Our first task was to locate the original cohort—a search that got underway in the spring of 2001. When we found most of them, we conducted a set of two to three hour semi-structured interviews, tape-recorded and transcribed them, and met regularly as a research team of five to discuss and analyze the data.

In each interview, we explored the individual's successes and failures, the opportunities and barriers they encountered, and how they dealt with them. We asked specific questions about key choices, probing why they did what they did. And we compared these responses within the context of the broader narrative in which these choices were embedded, trying to get purchase on the *whys* behind each person's choices. The risks of retrospective sense making are obvious, but less problematic to the extent that we focused on actual choices. These risks are also balanced by drawing data from two interviews, seventeen years apart, comparing actual choices with inquiries about the choices, and our own practice as skilled interviewers, paying attention to affect, context, and metaphor.

Coding the interviews was a multi-step process. First, we reconstructed profiles of each person's career path based on data drawn from both interviews. We focused on the choice points in their careers, how they accounted for their choices, and what the outcomes were. And we began to discern narrative accounts of what we call projects: accounts of where one hopes to go (goals), why one wants to get there (motivations), and how one thinks he can arrive at his destination (means). We then evaluated the utility of people's projects in understanding their patterns of behavior, the findings of which we present here.

In this paper, we look only at the people in the original sample who were between 30 and 45 years of age when they were first interviewed in 1984, a total of 86. As table 6.1 shows, of these we were able to contact 75 (87 percent). At least 2 of the 11 we could not contact were deceased<sup>6</sup>. Of those we could contact, 48 (64 percent) were still working for a union, 3 (4 percent) had retired from a union, and 24 (32 percent) had left union work before retiring. Our study is based on those interviewed as of the writing of this paper—68 (91 percent) of the total interviewees available to us.

TABLE 6.1  
Union leaders interviewed in 2001

Original Group	86
Deceased	2
Percent of Original Group Still Living	98%
Total Living	84
Found	75
Percent Found	89%
Working for Union	48
Percent of Those Found Working for Union	64%
Retired from Union	3
Percent of Those Found Retired from Union	4%
Left Union	24
Percent of Those Found Who Left Union	32%
Retired After Leaving	0
Percent of Those Found Who Retired After Leaving Union	0%
Interviewed	68
Percent of Those Found Interviewed	91%

## BACKGROUNDS

Who were these 68 union leaders? Table 6.2 gives the broad picture. Perhaps accurately reflecting the makeup of mid-level union leadership in 1984, only 14 (21 percent) were women. Ethnically, the vast majority were non-Hispanic Caucasians. Eleven (16 percent) were Hispanics, a significant group that played an important role in the recent revival of California unionism. Fifteen (22 percent) were immigrants or had at least one immigrant parent. Despite considerable efforts to find rising African American union leaders to interview, Ganz and Washburn found only two in the 45-and-under age group and we were unable to interview either one again in 2001–2002.

With regard to religious background, half were raised Roman Catholic, one-quarter Protestant, one-fifth Jewish, and the remaining 5 percent claimed no religion. Only a minority had what might be called a devoutly religious upbringing, but a small and interesting proportion of these had attended a religious seminary or given serious thought to a religious career.

Traditionally, union leaders had working-class parents, a high school (or, rarely, college) education, and began their union careers as rank-and-file members of the unions they later represented. This standard path appears to be changing—more so in some unions than in others—with the nature of the change already dramatically apparent in the demographics of the leaders we interviewed. A bare majority came from working-class parents; indeed 47 percent were classified as having middle-class background. In considerable contrast to earlier generations of union leaders, only one-third of the entire group interviewed had union parents (Mills 1948). Reflecting the dramatic

TABLE 6.2  
Union Leaders Interviewed in 1984 (30–45)

Individual and Organizational Characteristics		Number	Percent
Positions	CEOs	31	46%
	Other Elected Full Time Officers	0	0%
	Organizers & Organizing Directors	12	18%
	Other Appointed Directors	3	4%
	Business Agents	11	16%
	Business Agent-Organizers	8	12%
	Others	2	3%
How Selected?	Elected	26	38%
	Appointed	42	62%
Directing Staff?	Yes	38	56%
	No	30	44%
Organizing Experience	Some Organizing Before 1984	51	75%
	Organizing Responsibility in 1984	20	29%
Union Sector	Federation	8	12%
	Public	15	22%
	Service	16	24%
	Craft	13	19%
	Industrial	16	24%
Region	Los Angeles County	24	35%
	Orange County	4	6%
	San Diego County	4	6%
	Bay Area	26	38%
	San Jose	5	7%
	Central Valley	5	6%
	Inland Empire	0	0%
Gender	Male	54	79%
	Female	14	21%
Ethnicity	White	57	84%
	Hispanic	11	16%
Class	Working Class	36	53%
	Middle Class	32	47%
Religion	Roman Catholic	34	50%
	Protestant	18	26%
	Jewish	13	19%
	None	3	3%
Family Background	Union Family	23	34%
	Immigrant/Immigrant Family	15	22%
Education	College Completed When Went to Work for Union	38	56%
	College Not Completed When Went to Work for Union	30	44%
Marital Status in 2001	Ever Married by 2001	64	94%
	Married Only Once by 2001	29	43%
		Number	Percent
Recruitment			
Experience Prior to Recruitment	Activism	36	53%
	Military	10	15%
Source of Recruitment	From Inside the Workplace	46	68%
	From Outside the Workplace	22	32%

expansion of higher education among working-class youth in the 1960s and 1970s, a majority of our interviewees were college graduates, and a considerable number of those had done some graduate work. Far from incidentally, most of our college-graduate leaders were in college during the civil rights and anti-war movements of the 1960s and early 1970s. Many reported being radicalized in college, and some even participated in anti-war activities in high school. A majority (53 percent) were political or social activists in community or political organizations prior to their union employment. Again, in contrast to previous leadership generations, one-third (32 percent) were hired directly from "outside," without having first been a member of the union for which they worked.

### WHY THEY CAME TO WORK FOR UNIONS

In our interviews, we asked people how they came to do union work, why they kept doing it, and, when relevant, why they left to do something else. From these accounts, we coded the projects each person had when they began working in the labor movement. We distinguished four broad projects: social reform, community leadership, personal advancement, and union building.

*Social Reformers.* These people were drawn into union work as a means of pursuing social reform. Motivated by their commitment to social justice, they generally believed political work was the best way to make the world a better place. For them, union work provided an opportunity to achieve goals that were even broader than those of the union.

*Community Leaders.* Community leaders hoped to improve the lives of the members of their community through union work. These leaders defined their communities based on ethnicity, kinship, or work place—often in combination. They were motivated by identification with their communities and believed they could best serve those communities by representing their interests and acting on their behalf. They often indicated willingness to assert community interests over union interests.

*Union Builders.* Union builders viewed union work as an end in itself. Often having had direct experience with the difference a union can make in one's life, they were motivated by the desire to improve the lives of others in the same way. They articulated that the best way of achieving that goal was to negotiate good contracts, win grievances, organize, and service members.

*Personal Advancement.* A number of interviewees got involved with union work with the objective of improving their individual lives. For some, union work offered the prospect of upward mobility; for others, a more interesting job; and for still others, a way to achieve influence and power. They looked for work based on the opportunity it offered, expressed themselves in

TABLE 6.3  
First union projects

Project	Number	Percent
Social Reform	36	53%
Community Leadership	10	15%
Union Building	11	16%
Personal Advancement	11	16%
Total	68	100%

non-ideological terms, and typically considered union work as one option among others.

Table 6.3 shows the number of labor leaders who came into the movement with each project. The largest single group, some 54 percent, had social reform projects when they first began working in the labor movement. The remaining 46 percent of those interviewed were divided among community leaders (16 percent), personal advancement seekers (16 percent), and union builders (13 percent).

### Social Reform

Chart 6.1 presents the class background, education, source of recruitment, and activist experience of the 36 people who came to the labor movement with a social reform project. More than half of the social reformers came from middle-class backgrounds and were college educated. Almost another third were college graduates from working-class homes. Regarding recruitment, the social reform group is split evenly between those who were hired from the outside the union and those who were promoted from within. They include men and women.

As column 4 indicates, prior activism is the common thread connecting those interested in social reform. Regardless of class background, education, gender, or recruitment method, every social reformer, save one, had been actively involved in social movements before coming to work for a union.

In our interviews, we explored people's early activism and tried to understand how it led to union work. We discovered three types of activism that brought social reformers into the labor movement; each type of activism was associated with a different pathway into union work. One type, which we label "unaffiliated," involved participation in the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s without membership in a vanguard political group. A second type of activism, "faith-motivated" activism, was rooted in religious commitments. A third variety, "vanguard" activism, entailed membership in a vanguard political group. No path to social reform was the exclusive route of any one

Chart 6.1. Social reform as first project by class, education, source of recruitment, and activist experience

Name	Class	Education	Recruited?	Activist?	1st project
Sam Hoffman		C+	Out	Y	SR
Karen Emory		C+	Out	Y	SR
Neil Rosen		C+	Out	Y	SR
George Kaufman		C+	Out	Y	SR
Sam Rosenberg		C+	Out	Y	SR
Eli Altman		C+	Out	Y	SR
Clem Donlevy		C+	Out	Y	SR
Nancy Masterson		C+	Out	Y	SR
Tom Nussbaum		C+	Out	Y	SR
Laura Feirman		C+	Out	Y	SR
Ulrich Darden		C+	Out	Y	SR
Nick Martin		C+		Y	SR
Kevin Rogers		C+		Y	SR
Rob Harrington		C+		Y	SR
Tom Weinberg		C+		Y	SR
Charles Keaton		C+		Y	SR
Vic Robinson		C+		Y	SR
Ralph Reeves		C+		Y	SR
Liam O'Reilly		LC	Out	Y	SR
Dianne Burton		LC		Y	SR
Norm Dunn		LC		N	SR
Henry Carl		LC		Y	SR
Ellen Atwood	WC	C+	Out	Y	SR
Nydia Elizondo	WC	C+	Out	Y	SR
Colin Gordon	WC	C+	Out	Y	SR
Karl Stephens	WC	C+	Out	Y	SR
Neil Eaton	WC	C+	Out	Y	SR
Carol Lewin	WC	C+	Out	Y	SR
Lloyd Callahan	WC	C+	Out	Y	SR
Henry Podack	WC	C+		Y	SR
Eric Marcovich	WC	C+		Y	SR
Kathrine McCarthy	WC	C+		Y	SR
Charles Harris	WC	C+		Y	SR
Linda Davis	WC	LC	Out	Y	SR
Rudy Del Castillo	WC	LC		Y	SR
Rom Giannini	WC	LC		Y	SR

KEY MC = Middle Class  
WC = Working Class  
C+ = College degree or more  
LC = Less than college degree

Out = Hired from outside the union  
In = Promoted from within the union  
Y = Activist before joining union  
N = Not activist before joining union  
SR = Social Reform



class; people from both the working class and middle class traveled all three paths.

Social reformers were a diverse group, and their pathways into the labor movement led in different directions depending on the specific nature of their activist backgrounds. However, they all shared a commitment to broad social and political change, and they all saw their union work as a way to advance this larger project rather than as an end in and of itself.

#### Unaffiliated Social Reformers

Those with an unaffiliated social reform project, the largest group, typically became activists in high school or college. Most were spurred to action by the anti-war movement, but some were drawn in by the civil rights movement or community activism instead. Colin Gordon's story of anti-war activism, which began in high school, is characteristic.

There was a feeling in the air in those times, and the draft, really, [was] the single biggest motivating factor in my developing of my thinking . . . I was reading about the war in Vietnam. But I was also reading about everything else. I remember reading about—was it in the summer of '67?—the riots in Newark and numerous other places. And, I remember a *Life* magazine cover with the guy killed by the National Guard for carrying a case of beer out of a liquor store that was being looted. And [they] had his bloody corpse on the cover of *Life* magazine. And I remember arguing with my father, saying, "You can't kill people for a case of beer." And my father took the other view, as lots of people did.

Gordon soon began to mobilize other students for anti-draft and anti-war activities. He continued this work when he went to college and joined Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). When approached by more sectarian groups, however, he "didn't opt to engage."

I went to some of the meetings, some of the study groups, and I read the books. And it seemed odd. I remember thinking, "This is such a great idea that these people have, if everybody would just work together and cooperate and share, this is like such a brilliant idea. But their approach is, like, they're never going to reach the people in the U.S. that it's aimed at. They're not gonna come close."

Instead, Gordon's college involvement with social movements centered on non-sectarian, anti-war mobilization. He was also caught up in the larger activist milieu, which included "symbolic support for black activists who were

being attacked by the government in '69 and '70 and '71." In his senior year, he supported a wildcat walkout of the cafeteria workers in the student center. However, that support ended when, "some guys in suits came up and told [the workers] to go back to work."

The "guys in suits"—union representatives—did not leave a favorable impression. When he graduated from college, Gordon had a social reform project, but unions were not the obvious place to look to pursue that project. He was typical of the unaffiliated social reformers with whom we spoke. Like most in the New Left, unaffiliated social reformers tended to view unions as undemocratic upholders of the status quo and the war effort. Making union work even more unlikely was the fact that most unions were opposed to hiring "outsiders"—people who did not come up from the workplace. How then did social reformers like Gordon come to do union work?

Here, too, Gordon's path is similar to that of many other unaffiliated activists. He came to union work only through involvement in a "bridge" organization, one that linked movement groups and labor unions. In his case, it was the United Farm Workers (UFW), which Gordon got involved with not because it was a labor organization but because it was part of a larger movement for social justice and civil rights.

It would have been, like, June of '73, in *Time* magazine. There had been a little article, and it was on the [modern-day] *Grapes of Wrath*. It was about the fights between the Teamsters and the farm workers in Coachella. And, it said, "We're in the same place that Steinbeck used to write about. In the dusty fields, farm workers are being subjected to this violence . . ." I read that article, and that was the first time that I really thought about the farm workers when I read that article that summer. And, then after that, I ended up in the [San Francisco] area. And then when I met them [again] I said, "God this is an amazing struggle." And, I was talking to my friends from Fordham about it, and they're saying, "Look, they need people. They're trying to get people to work full time with them and support them. You were always Mr. Protest and making us go to demonstrations and everything. Why don't you go work with them?"

Gordon began by volunteering with the UFW and went on to become a field representative and the assistant field office director. He stayed for six years. When he left, he "knew that [he] was going to continue in the labor movement," largely because he realized that he could carry out his social reform project by doing union work. He eventually ran into an "old farm worker contact" who had gone to work for the HERE local in San Francisco. Gordon asked if there were any jobs, and he was hired to run a picket line. He has done union work ever since, because, "if everybody did a better job organ-

izing their co-workers, we could make the working people and the poor people have a lot better share of what there is.”

Another organization that bridged the world of activism with that of labor movement was the Citizens Action League (CAL), a membership advocacy group battling the public utilities in California for reforms like lifeline rates for poor people. CAL’s founders, Mike Miller and Tim Sampson, were profoundly influenced by Saul Alinsky and worked with unions like SEIU on community organizing. Some of the social reformers, particularly those whose activism involved community organizing, came to the labor movement following involvement with CAL.

Clem Donlevy, for instance, became committed to a social reform project as a result of his experiences in the Peace Corps in Tanzania. After he left the Peace Corps, he spent a few years getting his master’s degree in urban planning and then working as a well-paid urban planner for the city of Boston, which he hated. Donlevy came to the Bay Area and began working for CAL, doing community organizing for a subsistence wage of \$60 per week. During these years, he never thought about working for a union. However, by the time he was ready to leave community organizing—because he “had learned what he was going to learn from [community organizing]”—his thinking had changed. Union work “was just sort of a natural progression,” after working with people in labor while at CAL.

A few of the unaffiliated social reformers began working for unions without previous involvement with a bridging organization like the UFW or CAL. Some in this group came from working-class backgrounds and became more radical in college because of contact with radical professors. Carol Lewin told us:

I really got radicalized in college. There was this history professor who taught Marxism and [explained] my whole life . . . My dad was a *salesman*, and he worked really hard. He would leave at 6:30 or 7 in the morning, and what he did was go to poor neighborhoods and sold household items that he had in the back seat of his car, like everything from toasters and irons to blankets and pots and pans. And people would buy it on a payment plan. And so then he would go back every week and collect \$5 toward the toaster or whatever, and that was his job. But, there were some people in my family who had, now I sort of realize they were, like, doing well. Not rich, but they were doing well. And so there was . . . I just saw the difference, and mainly I saw how my dad felt about himself, because about, like, his own sense of himself and dignity. And so then when I went to college and learned about Marxism and the alienation of labor and how people get their sense of themselves through work, it just, like, totally . . . I just felt this amazing [sense of belonging]. . . . It was like my family.

Another interviewee, Lloyd Callahan, came from a similar working class background and talked about two of his professors—one a Marxist and the other an “anti-communist Socialist.” Their teachings “made sense” of his father’s life, offered him some pride of class, and a “philosopher’s stone” to understand the world.

Once they had been radicalized, Lewin and Callahan entered union work more directly than Gordon and Donlevy. All it took was exposure to an organizing campaign or a job lead. Lewin, for example, had a summer internship in Washington, D.C., while she was still in college. While there, she roomed with someone who was working on an organizing campaign at the AFL-CIO.

I went there originally to work in the Health and Human Services, because I thought I wanted to go into public health. But I went there and it was during the Reagan years, and I can still remember this little cubicle I had at that office. And it was really boring. But I lived in this house with all these women who had all different jobs. And one of them had a job working for the AFL-CIO for the Food and Allied Service Trades, FAST. And so I remember she came home one night and said, “Tonight I have to go out at 2 in the morning to meet these waitresses at the Watergate Hotel. And, then I have to be up at 6 in the morning to leaflet a cleaners.” And I went, “Oh my God! That’s what I want to do.” So I just quit. I got the internship also with AFL-CIO.

When I was at Berkeley, I was in the New American Movement, and I definitely knew that capitalism sucked . . . but I didn’t know what you could do about it . . . because no one really talked about unions. But I studied all about gigantic corporations screwing over Third World countries. And then I knew that some people made all the money in the world but never spend it, and other people couldn’t afford anything. And I felt like that about my family . . . but didn’t know what to do . . . So then when I went to Washington, and I saw that people were doing that, I went, “God that’s what I should do.” And I remember thinking, “I can’t believe that I could actually do this and have it be a job! . . . And so then when I left there and went back to [San Francisco], I looked up Local 2. And that was the job I got.

Similarly, Callahan submitted a resume when he heard that the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) was looking for organizers. In both cases, Lewin and Callahan seemed more predisposed than middle-class unaffiliated social reformers to think of unions as vehicles for social change. Job opportunities were also necessary for other unaffiliated social reformers—but so was participation in a bridging organization where they learned that unions could be vehicles for social change.

Another path by which some unaffiliated social reformers entered the labor movement was social work, which in the early 1970s was a target of aggressive organizing campaigns by the SEIU and the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). Social work was a rapidly expanding occupation in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It attracted large numbers of social reformers because it seemed to deal directly with the problem of poverty in American society. Before 1968, California public sector workers had no legally protected right to unionize. The situation changed with the 1968 passage of the Meyers-Milius-Brown Act, a law that guaranteed public employees the right to unionize and bargain collectively. A few of our interviewees entered union work as a result of organizing drives in their units; some determined that joining the union was a good way to protect themselves from managers who objected to their activist agendas.

One example is Rudy Del Castillo, who went to work as a welfare eligibility worker in southern California after being involved in anti-war and Chicano groups at a University of California campus. He discovered that Hispanic welfare applicants were disadvantaged because the Spanish translation of their applications was so inept that deserving people did not get public support. He helped organize social workers, clients, community people, and Chicano activists from the local university to agitate for better translations. They won, but managers soon retaliated against the social workers, who, in turn organized a union that affiliated with SEIU. When Del Castillo was fired for his activities, he took a staff job with SEIU.

#### Faith-Motivated Social Reformers

Some social reformers found their way into the labor movement through their religious convictions. All of these activists were Roman Catholic, and all but one trained to be a nun or a priest before becoming involved in the labor movement. Their belief in social reform was profoundly shaped by faith. Liam O'Reilly, for example, joined the UFW boycott with other seminarians. He soon took a year off from the seminary to work for the UFW. One of his schoolmates asked, "Why are you doing that?" O'Reilly responded, "Building the union is like building the church without the crutch of religion."

After a year, O'Reilly left the UFW but found his way to HERE. When we asked him how he sees his union work today, he echoed his earlier views that the union "gives people hope, gives people a way to be heard, gives a chance for there to be justice, or something resembling justice. Something resembling fairness, and a way for people not to be powerless . . ."

Just as it was for many of the unaffiliated social reformers, the UFW was a common point of entry into the labor movement for those who arrived at their social reform project through religion. For the unaffiliated social reform-

ers, the UFW bridged the divide between the social movements of the 1960s and unions because it was a way to fight for civil rights. However, for the social reformers motivated by faith, the UFW was a bridge between a religious vocation and the secular world. For example, one woman in this group, Linda Davis, remembered her father telling her that Cesar Chavez was "a modern day saint." Faith-motivated social reformers joined the UFW because of the union's profound religious content. After becoming active, they came to view union work as a means of carrying out their commitment to social justice.

#### Vanguard Social Reformers

The third way social reformers entered the labor movement was through activism linked with membership in a vanguard political group, such as the International Socialist Organization. For these people, union work was a very different undertaking than it was for either the unaffiliated or the faith-based activists. Political activists took jobs in factories and offices as "colonists," with the intent to remake unions. For example, when we asked Ralph Reeve why he came to work for a union, he told us:

I had decided that I wanted to try to apply my politics in the labor movement. That was sort of a place you could go to foment social change, and that's what I wanted to do. So, why the Post Office in particular? I just sort of fell into that. But, I wanted to get into a blue collar, industrial setting of some sort, and that was what I landed.

Asked if he was affiliated with any group that shaped his politics, he replied, "For a while, I was a member of something called 'The New American Movement' and, after that, International Socialists." He went to work for the Post Office after graduating from Swarthmore. His goal was to "reform the unions . . . The view was that the unions were terrible; they were corrupt; they were bureaucratic. We were going to transform the unions and remake them so that they would be workers' unions."

After landing a job as a mail carrier in California, Reeves volunteered to be a shop steward. A year later he ran for recording secretary of the local American Postal Workers Union and took an active part in a movement to merge several branches. A few years later, he successfully ran for the presidency of the merged local.

Other vanguard activists took a similar "colonist" path to union work. This partially explains the large number of social reformers who entered union work from the workplace. Of the 17 social reformers who were recruited from within the workplace in chart 6.1, seven had gone to the shop floor with a radical political agenda.

**Chart 6.2.** Community leadership as first project by class, education, source of recruitment, and activist experience

Name	Class	Education	Recruited?	Activist?	1st project
Linda Donatello		C+		N	CL
Don Bertlesman		LC		N	CL
Nicolas Manriquez	WC	LC		N	CL
Rick Borjas	WC	LC		N	CL
Dick Lara	WC	LC		N	CL
Karl Norman	WC	LC		N	CL
Carlos Sanchez	WC	LC		Y	CL
Bob Alcala	WC	LC		Y	CL
Cal Lopez	WC	LC		Y	CL
Oscar Herrera	WC	LC		Y	CL

**KEY** MC = Middle Class  
WC = Working Class  
C+ = College degree or more  
LC = Less than college degree

Out = Hired from outside the union  
In = Promoted from within the union  
Y = Activist before joining union  
N = Not activist before joining union  
CL = Community Leadership

### Community Leadership

As chart 6.2 shows, we interviewed ten people whose initial project was community leadership. All but two of them were from working class backgrounds, and only one finished college. Seven of the ten (70 percent) were Latinos whose work for the union was an extension of prior, ethnic community leadership.

Bob Alcala, a Chicano community leader, joined the Laborers' union after his uncles helped him find work in the trade. Before becoming active in the union, Alcala had taken part in Chicano community fights over police brutality and public parks. He gained visibility in the union as a critic of the established leadership and acquired a following through his position as a union foreman. After Alcala helped the bargaining committee with a particularly tough set of negotiations, the incumbent leaders invited him to serve as a business agent. Alcala made his decision whether to accept the offer very carefully.

So . . . when the negotiations were finalized, the business manager told me, "I want you to come to work for me." So I said, "Let me think about that." I mean, I had people; I was building a political base. And I'm thinking, "What are they going to think? That I sold out?" So I told them, "This is what we want, and this is the way I see it. I can go to work for them and try to do some good from the inside, or stay out here and fight them from the

outside. You guys make the decision." So that's how I ended up working for them as business agent.

Before going to work for the union, Alcala had built a political base among the membership whose views he had to take into consideration when deciding his next move. Later, he led his own slate to victory. What he liked about union work was helping people like himself. He said that he enjoyed, "just dealing with people that had the same common problems and the same things that [he] went through in [his] work. Being able to help them with these problems."

Two of the seven Latino community leaders were new immigrants from Mexico. One, Carlos Sanchez, had become active in the new immigrant community and later found work in a unionized bakery. Sanchez said:

I think that the main thing is that you want to help the people . . . I form a social club for people from Acambaro, Guanajuato. I started meeting people from there and say, "You know somebody else?" "Yes, yes, yes." So, I get all together, and we make a social club to help the people there. It was before [I got involved with the union work] . . . Probably a couple of hundred [people were involved]. We had parties. Saturdays, we had all to collect the money to buy things, to send the money to the Red Cross.

Sanchez became active in the union after the union "defended" him, and he began "defending" other workers as an extension of his "community":

They told me that I was going to be demoted to part time. And, I say, "Wait a minute. Why didn't you tell me? You didn't give me any notice, any warnings." They have a preference, because somebody was a friend of somebody. So, I went to the shop steward, and I told him. He said, "No, no, no. Call the union." I said, "OK." So, I called the union. They were there. They had a meeting. They said, "No, you cannot demote him." So, they leave me there. From there, I decide these guys are really something, and I start defending people. I called the union and tell them this is happening here, and this is not fair. I was translating to the people and helping the people. At that time, JB [the business agent] says, "What is this guy? He's good." I was helping the people, [so] the people talked to the shop steward there, to make me another shop steward for them.

Sanchez later worked for the union full time as a business agent and organizer.

As the excerpts above demonstrate, community leaders—most of whom came from working-class backgrounds, did not finish college, and are linked

**Chart 6.3.** Union building as first project by class, education, source of recruitment, and activist experience

Name	Class	Education	Recruited?	Activist?	1st project
Van Sanders		LC		N	UB
Ken McHenry		LC		N	UB
Sam Hendricks	WC	C+		N	UB
Ellen Gardner	WC	C+		N	UB
Sean Reardon	WC	C+		N	UB
Sid Lang	WC	LC		N	UB
Wendy Martinez	WC	LC		N	UB
Karen Williams	WC	LC		N	UB
Ernie Fredricks	WC	LC		N	UB
Edward Schneider	WC	LC		N	UB
Dick Gonsalves	WC	LC		Y	UB

**KEY** MC = Middle Class  
 WC = Working Class  
 C+ = College degree or more  
 LC = Less than college degree  
 Out = Hired from outside the union  
 In = Promoted from within the union  
 Y = Activist before joining union  
 N = Not activist before joining union  
 UB = Union Building

to their co-workers by ethnic, kinship, or other ties—saw their project as one of advancing the interests of their community.

### Union Building

For eleven of the labor leaders we interviewed, their project was “building the union.” As shown in chart 6.3, nine came from working-class backgrounds, and eight lacked college degrees. They entered union work from the inside, as volunteer leaders (stewards, organizers, etc.), and most won their first full-time positions through election. Both union builders and social reformers served as volunteer activists prior to union employment—union builders inside the union, and social reformers outside it. Union builders, however, described “awakenings” to the union in terms of personal experiences in which the union played an important role. Their stories often began with a successful stand against an injustice, usually in the form of a grievance, rather than with an account of values, commitments, or community responsibility.

Wendy Martinez, for example, grew up in an immigrant, working-class, union family. When she finished high school, she took a job at the phone company and began to move up. Although she belonged to the Communications Workers of America (CWA), from the time she began to work for the phone company, an incident in which she was personally involved turned her into a union activist.

I had this supervisor [who] is the reason I got active in the union . . . [S]he observed me for a whole day, and then she says to me, “You’ve got the highest production in the group. You’ve got the highest quality in the group. You’re going places. I’m going to recommend you to get into . . . management. Oh, I’m just so pleased.” She really just couldn’t say enough about what good job I was doing.

As a person who cared deeply about respect for her work, Martinez hoped this would earn her the opportunity to become a manager.

It was not to be. When she challenged her supervisor, her supervisor turned on her, and the union became her line of defense. The union contract provided that workers could be required to work an extra 30 minutes in an emergency. If one worker in the unit had to work, all had to work until the job was completed. But the day that Martinez’s supervisor took two of her co-workers to lunch, she applied the rule in an arbitrary way, angering Martinez. This incident brought her into contact with the union.

After they were gone [to lunch] for two to three hours, the supervisor . . . comes back . . . and says, “You have to work your half-hour.” We had to work a half-hour to make up for their three-hour lunch. So I say, “OK. I’m working my half-hour, but I’m sure everybody has to work their half hour.” But the minute the first [worker] got up to leave . . . I went to the supervisor’s desk, and I said, “Excuse me . . .” Now this took a lot . . . because I was very [shy]. But it was not right . . . It motivated me out of my shyness. I went to her and said, “Excuse me, I have a question. It’s my understanding that the union says that if one of us has to work a half-hour, we *all* have to work a half hour” [. . .] She was very good at turning people against each other. So she turns to the other [worker] who hadn’t quite made it out the door and says, “Oh, you’re going to have to stay and work your half hour because of Wendy Martinez.”

Martinez felt taken advantage of and protested. But the supervisor who had told her she was a candidate for management now reprimanded her.

Well, the next thing, the supervisor summons me to the conference room. She’s got all these binders in front of her, which were all my job evaluations. She’s kind of leafing through them, and she looks me right in the eye, and she says, “You know, Wendy, you’ve always been a very good employee. I hope that’s not going to change.” Very intimidating. She says, “I know you want to get into management.” And I really had aspirations, because it was more money. She says, “But you know, one of the most important management attributes is flexibility.” And I am seething inside. I am, like, so horrified.

I looked at her, and now I'm crying. But she didn't know I was crying from rage. I was so indignant that she had done this, and I'm crying, and I looked at her, and I said, "You know, I thought that we were adults, and I thought that if I had a question I could come and ask you. But, it's obvious that that isn't what's happening. You're trying to intimidate me because I'm a union member. And you know what? The next time that I have a question, my union steward will be in to talk to you." I didn't even know who that was! [As] soon as I used the magic words "union steward," [as] soon as I said that, she closed up all her books, and she said, "Oh! I certainly wouldn't want you to get *that* impression. That's not what I'm doing. And, by the way, you don't have to work your half-hour anymore" [laughing]. She left the room. I had to compose myself because I was like a blubbering idiot.

Martinez then took her first steps along a pathway to union leadership.

As soon as she walked out the door, I left that office . . . There was a union steward down in the basement . . . And I'm asking people, . . . "Where's the union steward?" So I go down there, and I find myself standing in front of this woman, . . . the elected secretary of the local . . . and I said, "Hi, my name is Wendy Martinez, and I want to be a union steward. Because if I'm going to stand up for my rights, I should at least know what they are!"

The disrespect she experienced on the job, her own gumption, and access to the union turned Wendy Martinez into a union builder; she saw the union as a means of turning her anger into action and of becoming the person she wanted to be.

For many union builders, an important moment is one in which they come to see what they once had perceived as an individual problem to be a collective one. Ellen Gardner grew up in a working-class family, finished college, and became a social worker. She joined the union, became active during a strike, and was elected a steward. She came to see union work as an extension of what brought her to social work in the first place.

I saw my job to be an advocate for the client. But that was more on a one-by-one basis. . . . I saw the role of being involved in the union as being an advocate for my co-workers as a collective group. And, at the same time, my clients as a collective group. . . . Eventually, I was in the job long enough to come to the conclusion that, as an individual social worker, I could certainly have an impact on the individuals that I ran into. But I came to believe that I could have a much larger and more comprehensive impact on what it was like for me to be a social worker and what it was like for me to be in this system trying to achieve something. I could have a bigger impact if I came

at it from a collective perspective. And I don't know. I believe that this is true in any labor situation.

Unlike social reformers, community leaders, and those seeking personal advancement—all of whom saw the union as a means to a greater end—union builders saw building a strong union as worthy in its own right. Like Wendy Martinez, they could become the kind of people they wanted to be by helping to make it happen.

### Personal Advancement

Despite the weakened state of unions in the 1970s, eleven of the people we interviewed entered union work as a vehicle for personal advancement. As shown in chart 6.4, six came from middle-class backgrounds, and five came from working-class backgrounds. Both groups had nearly equal numbers of college graduates and non-college graduates. Except for two of the college graduates, all were recruited from within the work place. Almost half of this group benefited from family connections that facilitated their election to or hiring into a union position, a fact that distinguishes them from the social reformers and union builders.

Dave Mills, for example, grew up in a middle-class family, married while still in college, and joined a union local with help from his father-in-law, a

**Chart 6.4.** Personal advancement seeking as first project by class, education, source of recruitment, and activist experience

Name	Class	Education	Recruited?	Activist?	1st project
Nathan Berman		C+	Out	Y	PA
Eliot Rudnick		C+	In	N	PA
Dave Mills		LC	In	N	PA
Len Thomas		LC	In	N	PA
Dan Landers		LC	In	N	PA
Walter Brown		LC	In	N	PA
Ken Brown	WC	C+	Out	N	PA
Debra Brown	WC	C+	In	N	PA
Sam Alioto	WC	C+	In	N	PA
Lionel Rivera	WC	LC	In	N	PA
Arnold Stokowski	WC	LC	In	N	PA

**KEY** MC = Middle Class  
WC = Working Class  
C+ = College degree or more  
LC = Less than college degree

Out = Hired from outside the union  
In = Promoted from within the union  
Y = Activist before joining union  
N = Not activist before joining union  
PA = Personal Advancement

union officer. After finishing college, he was not sure what to do. He had a family to support, so he continued driving a truck. By then, however, his co-workers had begun to turn to him for help with their grievances. When they elected him a steward, he began considering union work as a career option. "I mean I kind of viewed the job as being like an attorney. Like many other union leaders, Mills described his decision to run for union office as the result of urging by others. But it was one option among many.

People had suggested that I run—the election was coming up: guys I was working with, co-workers, . . . and my brother-in-law who was also working there. . . . The idea appealed to me, but I didn't know if I wanted to do that because the local was chaotic. [But] . . . I had to make a choice of what I wanted to do. I'd been going to school, back to UC. So I was kind of looking around, and I started looking into the union, and I started thinking, "Maybe I could do this. Maybe I could make some kind of a difference." But, the local was such chaos, and the BAs were all elected. But, I thought, "Well . . . you know, it's [a] pretty heady thing when your co-workers say, 'You ought to do this' and start pushing." Anyway, I ran, and I came in, I think, third or fourth out of 12 people that ran for BA . . . I put on *very* aggressive campaigns, much more aggressive than anything the local had seen before. So, anyway, I got elected. I couldn't believe it. The election ends, and geez, I got elected.

Mills carefully considered the options before taking the risk of running for union office. Once he decided to take the risk, with his future at stake, he was very committed to winning—which he did.

For others, union work offered the opportunity to find more meaningful work. Ken Brown, for example, came from a working-class family, finished college, got married, and began teaching high school. However, he was unhappy in this work. Brown's father-in-law, a local union leader, recommended him to his union's organizing director, who needed organizers to take advantage of the new state collective bargaining law. Brown saw an opportunity. He was already sympathetic to unions, and the promise of more satisfying work made the union an attractive job option.

And so they said they were interested in hiring, like, twenty organizers statewide to do some work in the school districts. So I thought, "I'd like to try that for a while. . . ." "I just thought it was exciting. It was challenging. [The organizing director was an] exciting guy. He just had a lot of energy. He was very tuned in to how to do things.

The search for opportunities for personal advancement is part of many people's professional decisions. For those whose *project* was personal advance-

ment, however, they recounted it as their primary consideration. Although they had links to the union world, it had no claims on them until they saw that it offered them a way to pursue their own career goals.

#### WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM?

We have observed how people's projects influenced their decisions to go to work for unions. We turn now to learn how those projects unfolded over time and how this influenced those who stayed in the labor movement and those who left it. Chart 6.5 groups interviewees according to their first union project, and includes people whose projects were social reform, union building, personal advancement, and community leadership. The second column shows whether or not each person's project changed over the course of his or her work with a union. If it did change, the second column indicates the new project. The third column shows each person's final union project. If an interviewee still works for a union, the column indicates his or her current project; if the interviewee has left the union, the project he or she was pursuing at the time of departure is indicated. Finally, the fourth column indicates whether the interviewee still works for a union. If the interviewee works for a union, a project is indicated; if the interviewee does not, the space is blank.

Chart 6.5 shows the two important ways in which people's projects interacted with their union leadership careers over time. Most adapted their projects to union work or left the union. Indeed, we found that most of our interviewees became union builders, and most of the union builders continued working for unions. Only 11 people began as union builders, but 38 developed a union building project at some point in their union career. Most of those who did not become union builders left union work. Of the 7 people who developed new kinds of projects, all but 2 left. Those who placed family concerns first left, as did 2 of those who became entrepreneurs.

The major exception to this pattern of adaptation or exit, however, is that of the social reformers. Of the 36 original social reformers, 22 continue to work for unions. Thirteen of these remain social reformers. Only 8 became union builders.

#### Becoming Union Builders

How and why did most of those who continued to work for unions become union builders? The pathway people followed was influenced by their original project.

**Chart 6.5.** First project, transition, and final union project with who stayed and who left

Name	First project	Second project	Last project	In or out
Henry Carl	SR	CL	CL	
Linda Davis	SR	FAM	FAM	
George Kaufman	SR	FAM	FAM	
Tom Nussbaum	SR	FAM	FAM	
Ralph Reeves	SR	PA	PA	
Nick Martin	SR	UB	ENT	
Sam Hoffman	SR	UB	UB	
Eli Altman	SR	UB	UB	
Rom Giannini	SR	UB	UB	
Sam Rosenberg	SR	SR	SR	
Lloyd Callahan	SR	SR	SR	
Rudy Del Castillo	SR	SR	SR	
Norm Dunn	SR	SR	SR	
Laura Feirman	SR	SR	SR	
Ellen Atwood	SR	SR	SR	SR
Nydia Elizondo	SR	SR	SR	SR
Karen Emory	SR	SR	SR	SR
Carol Lewin	SR	SR	SR	SR
Nancy Masterson	SR	SR	SR	SR
Colin Gordon	SR	SR	SR	SR
Eric Marcovich	SR	SR	SR	SR
Liam O'Reilly	SR	SR	SR	SR
Neil Rosen	SR	SR	SR	SR
Kevin Rogers	SR	SR	SR	SR
Karl Stephens	SR	SR	SR	SR
Dianne Burton	SR	SR	SR	SR
Tom Weinberg	SR	SR	SR	SR
Ulrich Darden	SR	UB	ENT	ENT
Neil Eaton	SR	UB	UB	UB
Rob Harrington	SR	UB	UB	UB
Henry Podack	SR	UB	UB	UB
Kathrine McCarthy	SR	UB	UB	UB
Clem Donlevy	SR	UB	UB	UB
Charles Harris	SR	UB	UB	UB
Charles Keaton	SR	UB	UB	UB
Vic Robinson	SR	UB	UB	UB

Name	First project	Second project	Last project	In or out
Karen Williams	UB	UB	UB	UB
Ernie Fredricks	UB	UB	UB	UB
Dick Gonsalves	UB	UB	UB	UB
Sam Hendricks	UB	UB	UB	UB
Van Sanders	UB	UB	UB	UB
Edward Schneider	UB	UB	UB	UB
Wendy Martinez	UB	UB	UB	UB
Sid lang	UB	UB	UB	UB
Sean Reardon	UB	FAM	UB	UB
Ellen Gardner	UB	UB	UB	
Ken McHenry	UB	UB	UB	
Debra Brown	PA	UB	UB	UB
Sam Alioto	PA	UB	UB	UB
Ken Brown	PA	UB	UB	UB
Nathan Berman	PA	UB	UB	UB
Eliot Rudnick	PA	UB	UB	UB
Lionel Rivera	PA	UB	UB	UB
Arnold Stokowski	PA	UB	UB	UB
Dave Mills	PA	UB	UB	UB
Dan Landers	PA	UB	UB	UB
Len Thomas	PA	UB	ENT	
Walter Brown	PA	PA	PA	
Linda Donatello	CL	UB	UB	UB
Don Bertlesman	CL	UB	UB	UB
Carlos Sanchez	CL	UB	UB	UB
Cal Lopez	CL	UB	UB	UB
Karl Norman	CL	UB	ENT	ENT
Rick Borjas	CL	CL	CL	
Bob Alcala	CL	CL	CL	
Oscar Herrera	CL	CL	CL	
Dick Lara	CL	CL	CL	
Nicolas Manriquez	CL	CL	CL	

**KEY** SR = Social Reform  
CL = Community Leadership  
PA = Personal Advancement

UB = Union Building  
FAM = Family Interests  
ENT = Entrepreneurship



### From Personal Advancement to Union Building

For the 11 people who began union work as a way to advance their careers, 9 became union builders as their commitment grew and they began to find greater meaning in their work. For example, Dave Mills, who we discussed above, entered union work in order to "move up." Once elected local business agent, he derived satisfaction from doing his work well, and his job began to take on new meaning.

He earned a reputation for competence, as "the business agent who could win any grievance."

I became known as the drunk's best friend and the crook's best friend. . . . Man, I became like an attorney. And if I could nail the employers on anything—a technicality or whatever—I would. I would nail them on it. . . . But the one thing [that] . . . going to college gave me [was] an idea of how to prepare some things—prepare cases and stuff like that. Oftentimes, I was dealing with terminal managers [who had] never gone to college, or supervisors who never had the experience. [These were people who] just came off a truck and became a supervisor. And the BAs didn't have much formal education. So I think that helped a lot. I had some very good decisions in cases I had. I organized workers. I mean, I did a lot of things. And so I got a pretty good vote.

After Mills won re-election to a second term, a regional union leader who had taken a liking to him asked him to become a full-time lobbyist for the union in Sacramento, the state capital. Mills had an interest in politics and took the job, even though he had to resign his elected position in the local. Although he learned a lot from the union's chief lobbyist, he became restive at having to follow someone else's orders. He also longed for "more direct contact with members."

Mills quit his lobbying job, went back to driving a truck, and began his campaign to be elected as secretary/treasurer of his local. He won a key position of local leadership and developed his union building project more fully.

Yeah, one of the things I wanted to do was to get the collective bargaining straightened out. . . . I don't care who you were in the local union. We didn't like the outcome of the 1970 negotiations, and we wanted to change it in '73. So, that was one thing. Health care, getting the best health care program we could for members, and a retiree health care program—[we] wanted to do that. I emphasized and argued for more money and better pension program. . . . I wanted to get collective bargaining agreements for members

. . . reviving stewards meetings, getting members involved in the process  
. . . establishing some kind of solid and secure financial position.

Mills went to work for a union, because it offered him an opportunity for personal advancement. As with other personal advancement seekers, however, Mills's project became one of union building, as he grew more successful, experienced the rewards that went with success, and relished the opportunity to make a difference.

### From Community Leadership to Union Building

Linda Donatello exemplifies the five community leaders who became union builders and continued to do union work. She became active in the union as a leader of a small group of teachers organizing to protest the changes a new principal introduced. At this point, she was motivated by helping her co-workers win the grievance; she had a community leadership project.

I was finding myself kind of fascinated by doing some of the background work for this particular grievance. And so I did it. And I clearly became the lead person. . . . Number one, it interested me. Two, I had the time to do it, and I was willing to do it. I did not see myself as taking that on for any other reason but that. I did not see the beginning of a new career [or] anything along that line.

After the teachers won their grievance, Donatello became more and more active in the union, and discovered she was skilled at the work.

So anyway, I started becoming *extremely* active in the Grievance Committee, to the point that I began going to represent teachers at level one, which was the site level of the grievance hearing. [I] started out having the staff person with me . . . [and] graduated, so to speak, to doing it on my own. . . . So I began then being involved in helping prepare the cases to go to binding arbitration. And I became almost like an assistant to the staff person. Just clearly I was spending more and more and more of my time involved in doing that kind of thing, doing some other things within the organization, and maybe helping to write newsletters or articles for the newsletter. Then people found out I could write and make stuff clear.

Gradually, as Donatello devoted more of her energy to persuading others to join the union, the union came to occupy a more central role in her life. Her project became one of union building. The "clincher" came when the state

union representative, looking for new leadership to revitalize a local that had been in an ongoing jurisdictional fight with another union, asked her to run for local president.

Donatello served as president of her local, which eventually included the entire city, for ten years. As is the case with many union builders, her greatest satisfaction comes from bargaining and representation:

All through my time being involved in the organization, I had continued to be involved in grievance handling . . . preparing for arbitration, [and] working with lawyers when we took cases to arbitration. And that always was my life . . . But it was something I really liked and enjoyed, and I did it. . . . There's always the challenge coming up with a document that you can be proud of that does good things for teachers—that strengthens their rights. I used to say that we'd know when we'd gone as far as we could go in bargaining when all that was left to negotiate was the quality of the toilet paper that was in the teachers' restrooms. . . . Obviously, when you go to the bargaining table, you don't go as an individual; you go as a team. . . . [But] there are sections of the contract that I can [point to and] say, "I did that. That was mine." . . . [There are] things in there that I know I helped make teachers' lives better. . . . So that I'm very proud of [that]. . . . The whole idea of teacher self-esteem, self-respect—that's going to be a forever battle.

Donatello began her union work as leader of a workplace-based community. As she gained more experience, however, she earned more responsibility and became increasingly competent at her work. She came to redefine her project in more institutional terms of building a union to make a difference in the lives of its members.

#### From Social Reform to Union Building

Of the 22 social reformers who continued to work for unions, 8 did so as union builders. For Charles Keaton, the transformation of his broad social reform project into one of union building occurred around his decision to seek full time union work. A faith-based social reformer, Keaton found his way to the Carpenters Union via the UFW. After getting married and taking time off to travel around the world, he thought about returning to the UFW. Ultimately under the pressure of having to earn a living, Keaton decided that he could blend his social reform agenda with a career as a carpenter.

I think I realized at the time, too, that a lot of activities could take place through rank-and-file carpenters. . . . People could still be involved in movement issues without necessarily working full time. . . . So I did a little shift in consciousness. . . . I became a journeyman. . . . We also had a group

called the "Concerned Carpenters." . . . Some people that were much more politically oriented—RCP [Revolutionary Communist Party] people and stuff like that—were involved. . . . They sort of pulled away. They got bored with the thing, but I kept it going. Well, we had meetings and mailing lists and putting out a newsletter every so often. There [was] probably a core group of six or seven of us [in different locals].

When he moved to Orange County so that his wife could attend medical school, he decided to seek full-time union work and plunged right into local union politics. "I had been active in the local," he said, "and by that time, I was very clear [as to] what I wanted to do. I knew . . . probably by, like, 1980. It was very clear that I wanted to work full time for the union."

As Keaton decided to seek full-time union work, he began to redefine his project from one of broad social reform to one of union building. In 1982, he launched an "insurgent" campaign to become a local business agent and won. Although he found that the "day-to-day work of the union" took more time than he had expected, he led an effort to organize new residential construction. He continued to organize, won re-election in 1985 and 1988, and became active in municipal politics. Although Keaton narrowly lost re-election in 1991, the council executive secretary appointed him as a full-time organizer. He continues in that role and draws his greatest satisfaction from "redirecting union resources into organizing."

When asked how his politics had changed since he began his career, Keaton articulated this vision of union building in this way: "I have found that what's good for labor is usually good for the country. Abraham Lincoln said, 'Any man that tells you that he loves America, yet hates labor, is a liar.'"

Henry Podack is another social reformer who found his way into a union as a social worker. After graduating from the University of California at Berkeley, he joined the AFSCME when it began organizing in the welfare department where he found work. His decision to enter union work, however, was not rooted in an ideology of social reform, but occurred almost casually. "I forget why," he said. There was an issue that came up that I ended up representing our side of the building there . . . and just continued on . . . I think I got lucky on my first grievance and decided I had talent." Podack was elected steward and later chief steward; he began to get a "fever" for union work when he began organizing and competing successfully with other public sector unions. "That was a very exciting organizing campaign," he recalled, "one of those where if you win your first one, you kind of get the fever."

After going to work for the union as a full-time organizer in another city, Podack returned home to establish a base. He built a regional council and was elected to lead it. Despite backing a losing candidate for International president, he won election to the national executive board of his union.

When asked about the satisfaction he had in his work, Podáck described his excitement about what a union can do for people:

It's working directly with our members in some struggle. One was in Eureka in '96. We had a county strike there. And it's when you see the troops really get a sense that they have some power. I mean, even the grievance wins when they realize that if you fight about it and you persist, and you fight smart, you can win some of these things. It's watching them feel empowered, I think, [that] is the greatest thing for me. . . . Well, I love to get involved in this. I'd rather do this than sit in the office and shuffle papers. I'm not a good administrator. My title is director, and that to me is hilarious. I love to mix it up in the field.

For Podack, the union offered a pathway to a successful career; it provided him with opportunities to do work he loved and to act on his social reform impulse. When asked to compare his politics today with those of his "Berkeley years," he described his move toward pragmatism, particularly at the local level:

I will have to admit that I have fallen victim to the concept of pragmatism on many occasions where I just did not see a viable alternative. Nor did I feel that maintaining a real radical position [was prudent], outside of making myself feel good and allowing me to say I'm a radical. . . . I still think I'm closer to the radical than the conservative. . . . And I've been to and worked for this union [in] Africa and [in] Asia and places. And so I come back thinking, "You know, we don't worry about dysentery every day. And we don't worry about some of the things." [ . . . ] I think my politics have been influenced by just my appreciation for how things work. . . . A lot of the shift for me has been to more local politics than national.

Thus, many union leaders—whose projects had been personal advancement, community leadership, or social reform—became union builders. Although they placed different emphasis on acting on their values, serving their constituency, or developing as effective leaders, their concerns came together in the "larger" project of building the union.

Not everyone became a union builder, however. Most who did not found that sticking with their project required moving on—except for the social reformers.

### Staying the Course and Staying In: Social Reformers

Those who found ways to pursue their initial projects within unions but without becoming union builders were almost all social reformers. How did

they do that? Six of them became part of efforts to change their unions. Seven others found ways to "negotiate" free spaces within their unions in which to pursue their projects.

Four of the thirteen social reformers who stayed the course went to work for HERE and remain there today. No one in our sample who went to work for HERE ever changed his or her project. This pattern suggests that, rather than HERE changing the social reformers, the social reformers helped to change HERE. Indeed, each interviewee who went to work for HERE took part in efforts to transform that union from an old-time business union into a social movement union.

Interestingly, the stories HERE leaders tell about their careers in the union have certain common elements. They took part in a formative political struggle soon after going to work for HERE. In that struggle, they formed relationships with allies that continue to sustain their union work today.

For instance, Liam O'Reilly, the faith-motivated social reformer discussed above, got involved in a bitter election campaign a few years after he went to work for a HERE local. That election, he told us, was fundamentally a fight "about the future of the union." He supported "the only person who understood organizing" or who was committed to making wholesale changes in the way the local was run. His candidate won the election. However, the power struggle continued because some of the staff had been on the losing side of the election, and they fought tooth and nail against change. O'Reilly was part of the small group of staff and rank-and-file union members who began to meet in the evenings and after work—he called it the "night shift"—to "talk about where [they] needed to take the union." This small group organized others and eventually won broad support for transforming the local union. Today, O'Reilly is still in touch with people from this "leadership group" who helped to convert the local into the kind of organization that fights for "justice" and "fairness."

While O'Reilly's story offers insight into how social reformers contributed to the transformation of a single local, Colin Gordon's experiences illuminate ways in which they contributed to changing the national union. O'Reilly was hired by Gordon, the unaffiliated social reformer whose journey to HERE via the UFW is recounted above. Gordon's first job was as strike coordinator for the local, a job that brought him into contact with Vincent Sirabella, HERE's legendary organizing director, and John Wilhelm, HERE's current president.<sup>7</sup> After directing a large and successful hotel strike, Gordon became organizing director of the local and formed an organizing team that included O'Reilly. Two years after coming to work for the local, Gordon was recruited to join the International staff and eventually became part of Sirabella's national organizing team. As a member of this team, he helped to reorganize several locals that had been trustee'd by the International union. Today, he is presi-

dent of a major local, a position to which he was elected after helping to revitalize the local while in trusteeship. When we asked him what he had done to turn around the local, he emphasized his tools for bringing about organizational change: team development, membership involvement, and organizing. "The plan," he said, "was to build a team of people so that we could, first of all, involve the members in the union and put the union into their hands. And then figure out how to approach organizing." Gordon remains a social reformer, having helped to transform HERE into the kind of union where one can pursue a social reform project.

Other social reformers who "stayed the course" told us about their efforts to change their organizations. Although they tended to suffer more political reverses than HERE leaders, they continued to do union work because they found "free spaces" that allowed them to sustain their projects. They also were often tied to a social reform network through which they could sustain their commitment.

One example is Tom Weinberg, a vanguard social reformer who led a successful insurgency in his local union. About a year-and-a-half after joining, he ran successfully for steward and then the executive board. Frustrated with how little he was able to accomplish in those positions and looking for another way to have more influence, he started an underground newspaper. Targeting "workers, families, and customers," it afforded him a way to conduct "propaganda campaigns" to solve problems he could not solve under the contract. Two years later, he ran against the incumbent local president, using the newspaper to articulate his broader view of unionism. That campaign proved to be a formative political battle. On the slate with him were two women, one of whom was a black Latina; a "young Latino guy" who would become his closest ally in the union; and a Japanese man. Weinberg won the presidency, but the old guard, with support from the International, Red-baited him and got the election thrown out. So he ran a second campaign and won again.

Consolidating power took a while, however, because many of the people on the executive board still opposed Weinberg. He built support by doing a good job at union work, focusing on race and gender issues, and reaching out to women and minorities in the union and in the community. Although these priorities fit with the politics of his vanguard group, he turned them into practical successes. He won a breakthrough private-industry pay equity agreement, ran a campaign to keep local pay offices open ("Save Our Services"), and mobilized community support to win Martin Luther King's birthday as a paid holiday. Success encouraged the International president to make peace with him; therefore, after eight years as local president, he accepted an offer to work for the international as a regional director. His early ally, the "young Latino guy," became the new local president. Three years later, the International pres-

ident asked him to become the national research director, with the understanding he was being groomed to be his successor.

The International president did not survive the next election; the fact that Weinberg's political prospects depended on this relationship ended his rise in the union. Although he still serves as national research director, Weinberg has little power to continue his efforts to transform the union. However, he remains a social reformer and, looking back on his career, describes himself as "an agitator" who continually "adapts to the situation in which he finds himself." He is fighting to get the labor movement to live up to its "responsibility to workers and working families," a responsibility he sees as extending far beyond "those people who are unionized." While serving on the International staff, Weinberg has organized a coalition to fight deregulation, a fight he considers crucial.

Weinberg is a social reformer who stayed the course, even in the face of setbacks and disappointments. His early successes as a local president enabled him to align his social reform project and his union work. Remaining in close contact with members of the vanguard group with whom he originally traveled to southern California has supported that effort. Although his efforts to transform his union appear to be stymied, Weinberg has found a "free space" from which he continues to pursue his project.

#### Why Some Social Reformers Became Union Builders and Others Did Not

A lingering question is what differentiates the social reformers who found ways to pursue their projects within the labor movement from those who became union builders? Two differences stand out. First, the social reformers who became union builders tended to be recruited from inside the workforce (75 percent). In contrast, 9 of the 13 (70 percent) who remained social reformers were recruited from outside. More specifically, most of those who became union builders were unaffiliated social reformers employed in the work force represented by the union they went to work for. Only 30 percent of those who retained their project had been so employed.

A second difference relates to the kind of work people did early on in their union careers. Of the social reformers who became union builders, only 3 out of 8 (38 percent) had worked as full-time organizers for a substantial period of time prior to their 1984 interview. This is in contrast with the social reformers who stayed the course, 11 out of 13 (85 percent) who worked as full time organizers (3 of the 5 who left to pursue their social reform projects had also worked as full time organizers).<sup>8</sup>

This suggests that the social reformers who stayed the course may have brought a greater purposefulness with them into their union work, a pur-

posefulness that led them to take the union job—organizer—that required the greatest commitment. And organizing in turn may have reinforced their belief that union work was a way to pursue broad social change. In contrast, social reformers who found their way to the union via the workplace may never have been as convinced about the contribution of union work to social reform.

### Leaving the Union

Some of the labor leaders we interviewed left union work. Why did they leave? Research on the careers of union leaders of an earlier generation shows that many went into management. In this generation, however, most of those who left unions continued to do work broadly related to labor's mission. Why didn't they pursue this work within their unions?

We looked at several factors to see whether they were associated with staying and leaving—including gender, ethnicity, religion, class, education, family background, marital status, recruitment, first union job, and mentors and sponsors. We concluded that people's projects had the strongest impact on their decision to stay in or leave. As has been illustrated, people who became union builders stayed with the labor movement. With the exception of the social reformers, however, those who did not become union builders often left the movement. And most of those who adopted new projects, like prioritizing family first or the pursuit of entrepreneurial careers, also departed.

Chart 6.6 displays the projects of those who left, why they came to leave, and the kind of places to which they went. The chart indicates that, of the 22 people who left union work, four were social reformers who found they could not pursue their projects by working for unions, and ten were community leaders or union builders (and one social reformer) who left after losing a political fight.

### Keeping One's Project and Leaving the Union

All but one of the social reformers who left union work did so after concluding that pursuing their projects required exiting the labor movement. They came to this conclusion after many years of doing union work. Like almost all social reformers, they had experience as activists before coming to the labor movement. Moreover, all those who left had been recruited from the outside. This may be one reason why they found that they could leave of their own volition.

Laura Feirman was a middle-class, college-educated, unaffiliated social reformer who entered union work after being a community and antiwar

**Chart 6.6.** Last project, reason for leaving, and what they do now

Name	Last project	Why left	Where now
Rudy Del Castillo	Soc Ref	can't do project	NGO
Laura Feirman	Soc Ref	can't do project	NGO
Norm Dunn	Soc Ref	politics	Back to work
Sam Rosenberg	Soc Ref	can't do project	Journalist
Lloyd Callahan	Soc Ref	can't do project	Politics/Journalist
Ken McHenry	U. Builder	politics	Business
Rom Giannini	U. Builder	politics	politics
Eli Altman	U. Builder	politics	Government
Sam Hoffman	U. Builder	politics	politics
Ellen Gardner	U. Builder	venue changes	politics
Bob Alcala	Comm Ldr	politics	Business
Dick Lara	Comm Ldr	politics	Business
Nicolas Manriquez	Comm Ldr	politics	Business
Oscar Herrera	Comm Ldr	politics	Education
Henry Carl	Comm Ldr	politics	NGO
Walter Brown	Personal Advancement	can't do project	Business
Ralph Reeves	Personal Advancement	project change	Government
George Kaufman	Family	project change	Education
Tom Nussbaum	Family	project change	Government
Linda Davis	Family	project change	Social Service
Nick Martin	Entrepreneur	project change	Business
Len Thomas	Entrepreneur	project change	Business

activist. She left the labor movement after eighteen years of trying to find a place where she could "create the kinds of changes that really need to happen." During those eighteen years, she worked for some of the more progressive unions in the labor movement—SEIU, the Screen Actors Guild (SAG), and the National Writers Union (NWU). In 1991, Feirman finally decided to find other work.

A bunch of things happened. . . . National health care goes down the tubes, in part because the labor movement can't get itself behind some real reform. NAFTA gets passed, in part because the labor movement has killed off all

the left wing people in Central America who could have helped them defeat it. A number of things happened that really changed my feelings about the labor movement relative to the rest of the progressive world. And, that needed to be bridged. That whatever happened next was not going to happen either exclusively in the labor movement or exclusively in the community sector and that we had to reconstruct the way the movement looked if we were ever going to win any of the things we needed to win again.

And the other thing that happened to me [was] I went back to something that had been a lot more important to me earlier and realized that I never again wanted to work in an organization that was basically white. . . . Race was my preeminent passion, and . . . I was really tired of working with people who were there by privilege. And I just was not interested anymore in that, and I no longer wanted to work in a situation where white people were in charge by fiat.

A year and a half after leaving her union job, Feirman created a non-governmental organization (NGO) with the mission of "advancing progressive organizing and supporting the people who do it." She is currently the full-time director, overseeing programs that support organizers from a range of progressive groups, including some unions.

The other three social reformers who left the labor movement told similar stories of years invested pursuing their projects in the labor movement and eventually concluded that in order to do what they wanted to do, they had to leave. One of these, who was similar to Feirman, started an NGO that supports the organization of low-wage workers, often in collaboration with unions. Another became a journalist, political consultant, and public official who works closely with unions. The third became a journalist who played a leading role in national debates on public policy.

#### Losing a Political Fight and Leaving the Union

Ten of the labor leaders we interviewed left the union movement after losing political battles. Five of them were community leaders, four were union builders, and one was a social reformer. All those who left after losing political fights had been recruited from inside the work place, perhaps making them more reluctant to leave on their own accord. After leaving, the paths of union builders and community leaders diverged, with most of the union builders making their way into state politics and most of the community leaders repositioning themselves in a local business or other local enterprise.

The number of community leaders who left is notable, because it is such a large proportion of all those who stuck with this project: five out of six people.

Four of the five are Latinos who had articulated their project in terms of ethnicity rather than workplace. None had completed college when they entered union work, and all but one came from a working-class background. This suggests that community leaders who did not make the transition into union building found themselves ill-equipped—in terms of organizational relationships beyond their local communities, shared projects, or alliances—to survive political reverses. This might also help to explain why they turned to local enterprises rather than state or local politics after leaving their union.

By contrast, three of the four union builders who left after losing political fights had middle-class backgrounds; two had finished college before starting union careers. They also represent a much smaller proportion of union builders than is the case with community leaders. This suggests that union builders were usually able to regroup after suffering political losses rather than leaving, as the community leaders did. It is likely that union builders were able to develop a broader set of relationships, shared projects, and alliances than could community leaders. This might also help to explain why they made their way into state politics rather than into local businesses.

Rom Gianinni, for example, was a union builder who began union work as a social reformer. He was recruited by a growing SEIU local that represented the municipal workers of a city in which he had found work painting street lines. With good sponsorship in a growing union, he rose quickly and became a dedicated union builder. When he came to the attention of the national union leadership, which was looking for people with whom to beef up its local unions, he was appointed trustee of major locals in southern and northern California and eventually earned election to the national executive board. But when he ran for president of his local, he lost. Deeply shaken by his defeat, Gianinni began to reconsider his project. The national union offered him a variety of positions, carrying him until he decided on what to do. They supported him in his decision to go to work for the speaker of the Assembly. Now he is a political consultant, closely connected to unions.

Dick Lara, by contrast, was a community leader who was a Chicano activist long before he entered union work. As an activist, he became active in AFSCME by organizing his work place, winning election as steward and, eventually, as vice-president of his local. He then accepted a full-time union representative position, a post in which he served for seven years. During this period, however, Lara devoted much of his energy to organizing and leading a city-wide, "Alinsky style" community organization, which was linked more to his experience as a Chicano activist than as a union official. When his AFSCME unit was decertified, he moved to SEIU to work as a business agent for a local branch of one of its statewide locals. He supported the formation of a separate local—part of the national union agenda—but had conflicts with

the national staff who fired him for insubordination. Although he pursued his project by remaining active in local community organizing, he was out of a job and began to sell insurance to make a living.

For Gianinni, like other union builders, recovering from a political loss was personally difficult but made easier by his ties to the union he had been building. For Lara, however, it was the case that when he fell out of favor with the union leadership, he found himself out of a job and without a union base on which to depend. But like other community leaders, Lara drew upon his community ties to find work, those ties being of real value.

### Changing One's Project and Leaving the Union

Eleven of the people we interviewed left their unions after they changed projects and did not find ways to pursue them within the labor movement. Five left while in pursuit of projects with which we are already familiar. One social reformer, Henry Carl, who became a community leader, left under the same circumstance as other community leaders: political loss. Three social reformers—Altman, Gianinni, and Hoffman—who had become union builders, also left after political losses. The one social reformer, Ralph Reeve, prioritized personal advancement and left to pursue his career.

Six others left to pursue new projects, developed in the course of their union work. Three social reformers—Nussbaum, Davis, and Kaufman—left to prioritize their family lives. Four people developed projects as entrepreneurs: Darden, Norman, Martin, and Thomas. And two of them, Martin and Thomas, left the labor movement. All four “entrepreneurs” passed through a “union builder” transition from initial projects of social reform (two), community leadership (one), and personal advancement (one).

### *“Family First” Projects*

Three of our interviewees left their unions because their projects became less important than giving priority to the quality of their family life. These people decided to sacrifice work with the union for family interests. They articulate this change in their project as an explicit decision associated with having small children, having to make choices about parenting, and so on.

Our interviews show that union leadership work often creates serious tensions between work and family. In three cases, these tensions were resolved (though often at serious costs to family life) with project changes which were in turn followed shortly thereafter by leaving the labor movement. All three of those who made this transition were former social reformers, and two were men. They came from middle-class families and had finished college. The

woman came from a working-class, union family but had not yet finished college when she began her union work.

Tom Nussbaum is a middle-class college graduate and social reformer who went to work for SEIU through a community organization with ties to the labor movement. He became the chief political operative of a major public sector local, a position of influence inside and outside of the labor movement. When he had two children, he became increasingly compelled by his role as a parent.

I was fully involved in parenting, probably really just in terms of the joy of raising kids. It seems to be my particular passion. . . . I did a bunch of psychotherapy, which I found very powerful. I think my conclusion, after all is said and done, was that my family was first and foremost. Which isn't an unusual conclusion. But [I realized] that, on a personal level, I wasn't going to work 60 hours a week again—that I needed to find a different path.

He found a way to spend most of a year at home, doing part-time work and focusing on parenting. He then returned to work part-time as community liaison for a major university.

Two other former social reformers, George Kaufman and Linda Davis, also left union work to put their families first. One continued to work with unions, but as an educator attached to a university rather than as an active union leader. Davis found her life “transformed” by motherhood, returned to school, and became a child therapist. Thus, although these three social reformers found they could not reconcile the priority they wanted to give to family life with a career in the labor movement, they did find ways to pursue public service careers.

### *Entrepreneurial Projects*

Four interviewees—two of whom left union work—developed entrepreneurial projects. These people turned their energies to initiating and developing their own enterprises—including, but not limited to, private businesses. For them, union work created the opportunity for new pursuits outside the union.

When compared with studies of earlier generations of union leaders who left unions, it is remarkable that so few in this generation turned to entrepreneurship. Although two had begun as social reformers, a third as a community leader and a fourth seeking personal advancement, all of those who developed entrepreneurial projects passed through a union building period. They had been successful in their union building, but it seems to have left them dissatisfied.

They also seem to have been well equipped to pursue new projects of their own. Three had come from middle-class families and two had finished college.

In the course of their union work, they all had acquired new skills, relationships, or resources that served them well in their new ventures.

Len Thomas's project trajectory went from personal advancement to union building to entrepreneurialism. Growing up in a troubled, middle-class family, he dropped out of high school and earned his high school equivalency degree in the Army, where he learned rocketry. Upon discharge, he found work in an aerospace plant represented by the UAW. The union steward recruited him, and the union offered him a way up by "getting people together to make things work better." As a "union builder," Thomas organized a new local, was elected president, and joined the UAW regional staff as an International representative. His "union building" project was shaken, however, when he was laid off due to industry cutbacks. He then tried his hand at politics. His candidate lost but asked him to join him in a business venture in Taiwan. The venture did not succeed, so he returned to the plant when recalled. When he was assigned to NUMMI, the joint General Motors/Toyota enterprise in Fremont, California, Thomas developed a deep interest in the Toyota system, "interdependent industrial enterprise." This became his new "entrepreneurial" project. He briefly headed a joint labor-management training program. Thomas then pursued it as a Vice President with a major aircraft firm, responsible for training in the new system. While there, he earned his MBA, despite having never attended college. When he parted ways with management, he continued his project by joining a consulting firm as a passionate advocate of the Toyota system.

For Thomas, then, the union offered him an avenue for personal advancement and a union building career during which he could acquire new skills, relationships, and commitments. These enabled him to become a dedicated advocate of a new industrial design system—his "entrepreneurial" project—that opened new opportunities for him outside the union. The other entrepreneur who left attended Harvard Business School, held a high post in the Clinton Labor Department, and began his own internet start-up company.

## CONCLUSION

We began this paper by asking where the current generation of California union leaders came from. What are their backgrounds? Why did they come to work for unions in an era in which unions seemed neither a way up nor at the heart of a social movement? Why did union work change some? Why did some work to change their unions? Why did many stay? And why did others leave?

Drawing on a unique longitudinal data set, we discovered that many of the demographic variables often used to explain social action—and the career choices of earlier generations of union leadership—did not, in themselves, explain much about this current generation of labor leaders. Instead, what mattered were their projects; that is, how they conceived what they were trying to do. Projects help us understand the diversity of reasons why people came to work for unions, how those reasons evolved, and why, in some cases, they became reasons to leave.

## Why Did They Come?

Some came to work for unions for traditional reasons. For some, it was because the union had made a big difference in their lives, and they came to believe that "building" the union was a goal worthy of their commitment. Others came seeking personal advancement, or a "way up." Some were leaders of communities—usually working-class and, in most cases, Latino. They thought unions could provide opportunities to serve those communities effectively. And some came on a mission of social reform, motivated by commitments to their faith, to vanguard politics, or to broad social change goals articulated via the movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

However, except for those from working-class families who were radicalized in college, few of those pursuing social reform found their way directly into the labor movement. Most passed through "bridging organizations," such as the United Farm Workers, the Citizen's Action League, or some other activist group. Their goals, organizational alliances, and the networks they had forged ensured that these organizations bridged the world of "the movement" to that of organized labor. Without them, it is unlikely that most of the social reformers would have found their way to unions.

## Why Did They Stay?

Our most interesting finding is the process by which some people's projects changed as they turned to union building as the project most consonant with that of their organizations, while others sustained their projects, finding ways to work at changing their unions.

First of all, we observed a process of adaptation. All of those who began as union builders remained union builders. Ninety percent of those who began seeking personal advancement became union builders, as did 50 percent of those who started as community leaders, and 36 percent of those who started as social reformers. However, we also observed a process of selection, as many



of those who did not adopt a union building project left the labor movement—i.e., the one personal advancement seeker who did not “convert,” 50 percent of those who started as community leaders, and 28 percent of those who started as social reformers.

But we also observed an exception to this pattern of convergence: the 13 social reformers, or 36 percent of the social reformers who were included in this study, remained committed to social reform and found ways to stay in the labor movement. Some became part of a concerted and successful effort to change their unions. Others found organizational “free spaces” in which they could trade pursuit of their projects for work the organization required.

It is also interesting to note that although social reformers—both those who became union builders and those who did not—made valuable contributions to the unions, the unions did not make any social reformers.

As we explain above, the common thread that runs through the backgrounds of the middle class social reformers is their prior activist experience and bridging organizations. For working class youth going to college and encounters with radical faculty seems to have played a similar role. It may well be that the formation of their project with respect to work at a time of life that scholars associate with the formation of political identity (Kinder and Sears 1987; Plutzer 2002) occurred in those settings. So the project of social reform was something they brought with them into the labor movement, especially those who came to work from the outside, thereby giving them a stronger predisposition to persist. In contrast are those, the union builders, who defined their work project in the labor movement. The personal advancement seekers seemed to have no clearly formed project with respect to work, coming to the union more as a matter of opportunity or convenience. They developed their union building project after becoming successful. Community leaders were most like social reformers in conceiving their work project in the context of their community, rather than in the organization of which they became a part, their union.

### Why Did They Leave?

Only a minority of the people in our study left union work: 22 out of 68 (32 percent). Those who did leave rarely did so because of “burn out.” About half of those who left lost political fights and either could not or did not regroup. The other half left because they could not pursue their projects while working for a union. For some, it was their original projects—as with the social reformers and community leaders who left—that pulled them away. For others, it was a new project—as with those who decided to prioritize their family lives or pursue entrepreneurial endeavors. Regardless of the reason, most who left

did not turn against the labor movement but went on to do work broadly consistent with its goals. In reflecting on this finding, however, it is important to note that the people interviewed in this study had many years of service as leaders behind them.

For scholars of the labor movement, social movements, organizations, and leadership, our findings demonstrate the value of studying agency systematically. Although data drawn from interviews, especially when retrospective, has its limitations, it nonetheless offers valuable insights into how people’s intentions influence their actions, how these intentions change over time, and how intentions interact with the organizations within which people work. It can never be enough to assume undefined “interests” as a theory of motivation; this is particularly important when considering organizations like unions, which are rooted in non-economic values. It is important to note that this approach makes visible the relationship—and the tensions—between individual and organizational change. Finally, given the work of leaders in the lives of organizations, learning how agency works is essential for understanding how leaders develop.

We also hope that our study is valuable for union leaders. It will, no doubt, be interesting to the people we interviewed. More importantly, however, we hope they will contribute some valuable insights on why people work for unions. Indeed, our study suggests that it may be more fruitful to focus on why people stay in the labor movement than on why they leave it.

Perhaps reflecting on their own experiences, leaders of today’s unions have reduced their reliance on “bridge organizations.” They have committed themselves to direct outreach to today’s generation of social reformers through the Organizing Institute, Union Summer, Living Wage campaigns, and the like. But it takes more than social reformers to build a union. It takes union builders, too. Our study underscores the fact that these union leaders often came from the workplace. They are people whose direct experience persuaded them of the difference a union can make in one’s life. Those who came to work for “personal advancement” reasons also became union builders—as their skills, relationships, and commitment to their organizations developed. In fact, for almost everyone, the union building project was related not only to his or her initial union experiences but also to the extent to which the union offered opportunities for their ongoing professional development.

A major concern is the high proportion of community leaders who could not find a place within the labor movement, particularly because of their roles in the Latino community. This may no longer be true. It may simply have been a consequence of the particular time period that our study covers. But it should give us pause.

If people leave their unions in order to pursue other goals, they are likely to continue their support of the labor movement. Union leaders would be wise

to wish them well. If they leave after suffering political losses, this too may be an unavoidable cost of contested elections. Fortunately, opportunities for staff to move between unions have expanded, so those who lose their jobs in one union may find work in another. However even when losing an election ends a career, these costs remain part of a critical accountability mechanism in America's largest—and most egalitarian—representative organizations.

## 7

## STICKING IT OUT OR PACKING IT IN?

### ORGANIZER RETENTION IN THE NEW LABOR MOVEMENT

Daisy Rooks

I came away from the three-day with a sense that [organizing] was more of a devotion, than a job . . . [I thought that] it was similar to going into the Peace Corps, or entering the priesthood. I [told my mother]: This is a commitment. This is something that needs to happen and I am going to give it my all. I need to marry this occupation for as long as it suits me.

(ARLENE, ORGANIZED 1 YEAR)

Some hardcore organizers [who have been] doing it for 20 years would argue that [organizing] is not a job, it's a calling. [They argue] that you have to be willing to give your soul to do this kind of work. . . . They would say that you shouldn't even try [to be an organizer] if you have a family, but that's bullshit. If you are good at your job and like it, why not fix it so that you can keep those good people?

(JUNE, ORGANIZED 10 MONTHS)

In 1995, John J. Sweeney was elected president of the AFL-CIO in the first-ever contested election in the federation's history. Determined to reverse several decades of union decline, Sweeney pledged to infuse new life into the American labor movement by re-committing the movement to organizing massive numbers of unrepresented workers in a number of expanding industries across the country.

Sweeney's blueprint for revitalizing the labor movement had two central components. First, Sweeney urged affiliates to develop aggressive organizing

open space for the possibility of change, counter-movements develop, grow and force reactions by the original movement.

#### 4. Overcoming Legacies of Business Unionism, by Steven H. Lopez

This research was conducted with funding from the University of California at Berkeley. The author would like to thank Michael Burawoy, Dan Clawson, Ruth Milkman, Sean O'Riain, Rachel Sherman, Eddy U, Kim Voss, Margaret Weir, and the staff and members of the SEIU Local A.

1. A pseudonym.
2. This election was held under the terms of an expedited election agreement between the SEIU and the nursing home chain, which allowed for an expedited, non-NLRB procedure administered by an independent arbitrator. Under the terms of the agreement, the employer agreed to schedule an election within four weeks of the union's petition; promised not to begin any anti-union campaign until after the petition for election had been filed with the arbitrator; and agreed not to engage in any "negative campaigning." Both sides also agreed to accept the decisions of the arbitrator as binding and forewent any recourse to court appeals.
3. Local A leaders and staff took me on as an intern with the explicit understanding that I was conducting research for a doctoral dissertation on service-sector union organizing. They were unanimously open toward my research and eager to help. Several staff members eventually read all or part of the dissertation and offered insightful comments.
4. On this point, Fantasia (1988) relates a wonderful story about a survey research study at an English auto plant concluding that "class consciousness was practically nonexistent" (7). While the study was at the printer, the workers got hold of a copy, along with a report of company profits. Two days of "wild rioting" ensued (7).
5. This claim was fully supported by the Department of Health's investigation.
6. The administrator's note to McMurray was probably an unfair labor practice, because it is illegal for an employer to ask a worker about their union activity. But in the scheme of things, this was not a major violation, and Hardy did not make a formal complaint to the arbitrator.
7. I have deliberately avoided citing the relevant newspaper articles, because there is no way to do so without revealing the identity of Rosemont Pavilion to anyone who wanted to look up the articles.
8. Sexism and racism are deeply rooted in the labor movement in southwestern Pennsylvania. The 1996 documentary film "Struggles in Steel," by Tony Buba and Ray Henderson, documents how the United Steelworkers Union collaborated with metal-industry employers throughout the postwar period to keep African Americans in the worst, lowest-paid positions, and women out of the plants altogether. The USWA's discriminatory practices persisted well into the 1970s, when a lawsuit filed by a group of African American workers against both the union and the major steel companies finally resulted in a federal consent decree mandating affirmative action for minorities and women. See also M. M. Fonow on women in the USWA (Fonow 1978).
9. A pseudonym.

#### 5. Justice for Janitors, by Preston Rudy

1. Unless otherwise indicated, I have used pseudonyms for people I interviewed and people's real names when referring to public events reported in the press.
2. This is a situation in which as one worker wakes to go to work, another returns home from his shift and goes to bed in the recently vacated, and still warm, bed.

3. All names are pseudonyms unless otherwise indicated. This account comes from files at the union's offices.
4. Though Sawyer was exonerated of any violations by a DOL investigation, political pressure from the House of Representatives over the appearance of collusion with SEIU resulted in his being relieved of his position (see U.S. House 1996 for a full account).

#### 6. Against the Tide, by Marshall Ganz, Kim Voss, Teresa Sharpe, Carl Somers, and George Strauss

This research was supported by the Institute for Labor and Employment at the University of California, the Nathan Cummings Foundation, and the Center for Public Leadership and Hauser Center for Non-Profit Organizations at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

1. Union leaders do not begin at the top, but instead work their way up organizational ladders. A focus on top national leaders reveals little about the careers of the thousands of other elected and appointed local, state, and national leaders who do the work of the union. Moreover, a focus on national leaders reveals little about why some rise to the top and others do not. Although scholars have examined unpaid rank-and-file leaders (Strauss and Sayles 1952, 1953; Peck 1963; Chaison and Andiappan 1987), few studies of the full-time people responsible for day-to-day union leadership have been conducted in America since the 1960s. Yet, in 1984, some 2,000,000 union members in California alone supported 5,000 full-time business agents, elected leaders, and organizers who coordinated the work of an estimated 26,500 volunteers.
2. Mische describes projects as "evolving, imaginatively constructed configurations of desired social possibility, accompanied by an implicit or explicit theorization of personal and/or collective capacity to act to achieve that possibility" (Emirbeyer and Mische 1998, 46–47; Mische 2002, 14).
3. Bandura describes this as "emergent interactive agency," which he distinguishes from agency as purely autonomous or as a mechanical response to environmental changes (Bandura 1989). This cognitive distinction is quite similar to the relational distinction Granovetter makes between "undersocialized" and "oversocialized" agency—actors as entirely autonomous individuals or as mere extensions of social groups, classes, or other collectivities. In sociology, a number of scholars make distinctions quite similar to that of Bandura (cf. Powell and DiMaggio 1989; Banaszak 1996; Zerubavel 1997; DiMaggio 1997).
4. Mische writes that collective projects can be defined as public narratives of proposed interventions by groups or collectivities (Mische and Pattison 2000; Mische 1996). Such narratives clearly have a projective dimension, in that they "embed identities in time and place" (Somers 1992); they give a sense of where a society and an organization have come from, while also delimiting where actors think, hope, or fear they may be going. Sometimes those collective projects encompass the youths' own "projects-in-formation"; sometimes they expand or challenge them; and sometimes they conflict with or cause internal dissension in an activist's perceived sense of direction and possibility.
5. From a psychological point of view, relying on verbal accounts to assess goals and motivations, as we do here, might be suspect. Similarly, sociologists would point to factors that can have an influence on career outcomes that have little to do with intentionality, such as the structure of leadership opportunities. To the contrary, attending to what people say about what they want in relation to what they actually did (which is what we do here) can teach us about the relationship between the two.
6. It is entirely possible that those we couldn't find differed significantly from those that we did.

7. Although we interviewed neither of them, Sirabella's "project" may have been one of union building, recognizing that "social reformers" can make a valuable contribution to organizing. Other labor leaders have from time to time recognized this—as in the legendary account of John L. Lewis's response to criticism for hiring Communists for the CIO organizing drive in the 1930s: "We'll see who winds up with the bird—the hunter or the dog."
8. Union Leadership Project.

## 7. Sticking It Out or Packing It In? by Daisy Rooks

1. In this paper the use of the term "organizing staff" includes field organizers, campaign coordinators or lead organizers, local union organizing directors and strategic research staff. Although strategic research plays a crucial role in new organizing, not all local unions have their own research staff. Larger local unions usually have several researchers on staff. Smaller local unions, or more centralized international unions, tend to centralize research staff either at the International union's headquarters or in regional "research shops" that service a number of local unions.
2. Throughout its history, both union members and non-members have participated in the OI. "Internal recruits" are union members who leave their jobs in the shop to work as full-time union organizers. OI founders welcomed the participation of "internal recruits," citing their unique ability to convince workers to join the union by citing their own experiences as union members. The Institute's founders also recognized the ways that non-members could contribute to the movement. Many of these non-members, or "external recruits," had been activists in the progressive movements of the '80s and '90s, such as student organizing, affirmative action, environmental justice, etc. The OI valued these "external recruits" both because of their experience with disruptive organizing tactics, and because they were a source of commitment, inspiration, and energy for the flailing movement (Bensinger and Porter 1993; Voss and Sherman 2001). This recruitment of radical labor organizers has a historical equivalent. In the 1930s, John J. Lewis hired scores of young communists to organize for his union. Although controversial, Lewis defended his decision by citing their organizing skills and willingness to do the work at a time when few others were (Milkman 1998; Zeitlin and Stepan-Norris 1989).
3. "Vulnerable workers" are usually defined as immigrant workers, women, low-wage and young workers.
4. The OI was originally funded by five International unions: SEIU, Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE), United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) and the United Steelworkers of America (USWA).
5. Tannock (2001) argues that employers treat young workers differently than adult workers, routinely offering them lower wages, fewer work hours, and less benefits than their adult counterparts.
6. It is important to note that the ideological content of this commitment and the preferred strategies for achieving social change is often different between both groups of workers. Perhaps the most salient example of the difference between the two is the fact that union organizers are committed to changing the balance of power both in the workplace and in society, while workers in justice jobs are more focused on providing relief (often temporary) to people in need.
7. "Inoculating" refers to preparing workers for employer resistance and the harassment of union activists that too often accompanies organizing efforts. Well-inoculated workers are better equipped to face adversity and successfully resist the impulse to drop out of the effort when the "going gets tough."

8. During their interviews, some respondents refer to the internship as a "three week." Prior to 1998, the OI internship lasted for three weeks. During this time a higher number of OI participants were accepted for the internship, and the field training component of the internship was used to "screen" participants out of the program when trainers did not think that they were ready to organize. Since the OI implemented the 10 day, fewer participants are accepted for the internship and trainers rarely "screen out" participants at this stage of the program.
9. Here "intensity" refers to hours worked per week, emotional intensity, travel requirements, etc.
10. When identifying quotes I use the word "organized" to indicate the length of time that someone organized before they quit. Use of the word "organizing" indicates that the person in question is still organizing and specifies for how long.
11. During Sweeney's administration, Linda Chavez-Thompson was both the first woman and first Latina Executive Vice President of the Federation and Arturo Rodriguez, President of the United Farm Workers Union, was the first Latino elected to the AFL-CIO Executive Board.
12. Although many would like to see the OI recruit even more non-white organizers, even its most vocal critics are likely to agree that the OI has done more to diversify the ranks of paid organizers than any other organization in the movement.
13. National Organizers' Alliance website (<http://www.gadgetfarm.com/noa/jobbank>).
14. The AFL-CIO Organizing Institute website (<http://www.aflcio.org/aboutunions/oi/training.cfm>); The Service Employees International website (<http://www.seiu.org/work/findjobs.cfm>); The United Farm Workers of America website (<http://www.ufw.org/jobs.htm>); and Union Jobs Clearinghouse (<http://unionjobs.com>).
15. When "probing," organizers search for organizing leads by making initial contacts with workers at targeted shops to ascertain their level of interest in organizing.
16. The literature on justice jobs indicates that institutions, such as the Organizing Institute that are responsible for recruitment and training, play a central role in developing appropriate expectations for new staff. Due to the tremendous variation that exists among OI trainers and recruiters, new recruits enter the field with widely different expectations about organizing, the labor movement, and their role in creating change within unions. Furthermore, factors such as amount of job experience, previous social movement activism, and prior exposure to the labor movement can shape new recruits' expectations about organizing. Because these other factors also influence new organizers' expectations, it is inaccurate to simply blame the Organizing Institute or its staff for creating unrealistic expectations among new organizers. Rather than focusing on the source of inaccurate expectations, this paper explores the content of these expectations and demonstrates how they can impact on organizer retention and turnover.
17. The following section details the impact of organizing success and failure on organizer retention.
18. SEIU's WAVE program is the exception to this rule. WAVE recruits and trains new organizers in small cadres in order to facilitate peer support. Initial classroom training on organizing is provided centrally, and unlike the OI, "WAVErs" receive a full year of field training in small groups. Service Employees International Union website ([http://www.weiu.org/work/seiu\\_wave\\_organizing\\_jobs/join.cfm](http://www.weiu.org/work/seiu_wave_organizing_jobs/join.cfm)).
19. A full innovator union is one that has fully integrated new labor's organizing agenda into its mission and operations. These unions allocate minimum of 30% of their resources toward organizing, employ an organizing staff of internal and external recruits, and routinely use militant tactics in new organizing campaigns.